

Deliberative Process

Interview Summary

Person(s) Interviewed: Bruce Holloman, State of Colorado Emergency Management

Interviewers: Eric Mosher

Date: December 10, 2015

Time: 1515-1545

Bruce was interviewed on December 10, 2015, as part of an internal EPA After-Action review of the Agency 's response to the release at Gold King Mine in Colorado on August 5, 2015. Bruce was assigned during the response to the Unified Command in Durango.

Synopsis of interview

General Observations and Recommendations.

- EPA should develop criteria for what an initial response structure looks like for a larger national level response. It would be helpful for both EPA's responders and partnering agencies.
- Area Command overshadowed Unified Command because the co-location and roles and responsibilities blurred. Area Command and Unified Command should not be co-located.
- EPA should conduct more hazmat exercises and training with local and State agencies.
- Would have helped to tell the good story of the response at the mine to get it under control. Response was quick and effective. Needed to share the history of the mine situation.

Notification

- At the mine site communications and notifications were quick. Notifications made beyond the site were slow and procedures need to be tighter.
- EPA needs better communications options when operating in remote areas.
- EPA had some challenges characterizing the nature of the spill, quantity released, and flow information. There was a perception that information was purposely not being passed along and shared.

- Need to share existing data and pre-existing condition information and reports. Watershed analysis and other products were not made available to responding partner agencies.

Incident Command/Unified Area Command Structure

- EPA resources were initially deployed quicker in New Mexico than in Colorado. This formed a negative opinion of the response whether this issue was accurate or not.
- EPA had a lot of technical specialists but were thin and not deep in trained ICS leadership positions within the Unified Command structure.
- For Planning, Logistics, and Situation Unit, the State brought in people to augment the EPA general staff. This provided some depth and capacity.
- This was not a normal response and not a typical response model that the OSCs are familiar with.
- EPA seems to be struggling to sustain a properly staffed IMT. The State if asked could have brought in a Type 4 Response Team or Type 1 Team to address the political response.
- Once established and ramped up the CO Unified Command was working OK. It was impacted by the Area Command being co-located. AC impacted resources originally deployed to the UC and didn't seem to fully share information which muffled the CO UC from performing their mission.
- Go big and go early would have helped.

Data and Information Management

- Data handling went well, but explanations and expectations for data were not clear. There needs to be clear objectives about why we taking samples.
- Timeliness for sharing data needs improvement. Diagrams of timelines, analysis, and review would be helpful.
- Agencies need immediate access to raw (preliminary) data products.
- There was a perception that EPA was trying to protect itself.

Public Affairs and Information

- Message was beneficial. However, there was a real struggle to get that message.
- Need to share data and information quicker. Public and community had a difficult time knowing what was going on.

- The Information Distribution Center seemed to have a difficult time getting together on a message.
- There were differences with the national message and the Colorado message.
- Public meetings went well. Not doing it would have been worse than doing it. Process to set up meetings was difficult. Highly political and contentious...talking points defused the situation.
- There was a perception that information was being held back by the feds.